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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHMFIA/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

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RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY

RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//USDP:PDUSDP/ISA:EUR/ISA:NESA/DSCA// PRIORITY

RHMFIA/USAREUR POLAD HEIDELBERG GE PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000553

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TAGS: PGOV PSEC MOPS PTER TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF GOVERNMENT-MILITARY
RELATIONS

REF: A. A. ANKARA 430

1B. B. ANKARA 475

1C. C. ANKARA 171

1D. D. ANKARA 222

1E. E. ANKARA 513

1F. F. ANKARA 502

Classified By: A/DCM Kim J. DeBlauw for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Summary: Turkish military operations against PKK terrorists in northern Iraq over the past three months have lent a facade of unity to the contentious relationship between the military leadership and Prime Minister Erdogan's governing Justice and Development Party (AKP). The Turkish General Staff (TGS), deeply frustrated by the AKP's 2007 election victory and its political clout, remains fiercely opposed to what it considers to be the ruling party's Islamist agenda, symbolized by the recent passage of the so-called headscarf amendment to the constitution. Future flashpoints include broader constitutional reform, programs aimed at addressing the demands of ethnic Kurdish citizens, and any measures perceived to cut into authorities or privileges of the secular elite. The March 14 closure case has put AKP on the defensive, taking attention away from the military's spat with the political opposition over whether the February ground operation into northern Iraq was terminated early under US pressure. Most expect TGS to act coolly in the days ahead, distancing itself from legal debate surrounding the closure case against the AKP. The political distractions expected as the closure case proceeds may weaken the government's hand as it considers non-military initiatives to weaken support for the PKK among Turkey's ethnic Kurds. End summary.

Iraq Operation Makes for Strange Bedfellows

12. (C) The Turkish armed forces' air and ground campaign against PKK terrorists in northern Iraq since November 2007 created the appearance of unity between erstwhile ideological foes TGS and the governing AKP. Both the military and the government contributed to and capitalized on an outpouring of Turkish nationalism following high Turkish casualties during PKK attacks in October 2007. Cross-border counter-strikes which followed beginning in December enjoyed overwhelming public support and both the GOT and TGS sought to take credit.

¶13. (C) The charge leveled by the main political opposition Republican Peoples Party (CHP) and Nationalist Action Party (MHP) against the military and the government (refs A and B), that the army withdrew from northern Iraq under U.S. pressure and without finishing the mission, has further driven TGS and AKP together. Chief of Turkish General Staff GEN Buyukanit characterized the opposition's charges as "treasonous." The opposition charges have touched a raw nerve, opening a rift between the military and its traditional ideological allies that will not heal anytime soon. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Erdogan added to the appearance of solidarity with the military by heaping lavish praise on military's performance in northern Iraq.

Military Frustration High

¶14. (C) Serious tensions remain between the military and civilian leadership, barely under the surface. While still regarded as the country's most revered and respected national institution, the Turkish military suffered a major political setback with the resounding re-election of the AKP in July 2007 and Gul's subsequent elevation to the presidency. Its infamous web posting of April 27, 2007, the Constitutional Court's controversial ruling a few days later, and the series of large public demonstrations in favor of secularism which TGS was widely believed to have supported behind-the-scenes hastened elections and, most believe, led to broader support for the AKP. With no prospect of popular support for more overt action against the government, TGS had no recourse but to wait and watch the government's actions as Gul moved to Cankaya with a headscarved first lady. Renewed PKK attacks in the fall of 2007, culminating in the Daglica ambush in

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October, offered TGS an opportunity to regain some prestige in the public's eye through military action.

¶15. (C) For TGS, among the most symbolic and provocative elements of the AKP's agenda was the government's pledge to pass a constitutional amendment designed to lift the ban on women wearing headscarves at universities. When it was clear that the AKP had the votes it needed with support from the MHP, Parliament pressed forward speedily with the constitutional amendment package. GEN Buyukanit declined to address the question publicly and, when pressed, commented only that the public was well aware of the military's feelings on the matter (ref C). The amendment gained parliamentary approval easily (ref D); however, President Gul chose to wait until February 21, the day on which TGS launched its ground attack against PKK terrorist positions in northern Iraq, to sign the amendments into law. The package is currently under review by the Constitutional Court and implementation, which had been hotly disputed by the universities, has been suspended.

Flashpoints Ahead

¶16. (C) The so-called headscarf amendment was a blow to the military. Future broader constitutional reform under consideration by the AKP will also be opposed by the military, which oversaw the drafting of the current constitution following the 1980 coup, to the extent that those proposals are perceived as anti-secular or as chipping away at the authorities of the state establishment. Another contentious issue ahead is the plan to address economic and social ills of the southeast. The military acknowledges that economic measures are needed in the southeast. However, it remains opposed to any broad amnesty for PKK terrorists, seen by some as necessary to bring PKK cadres down from the hills and into a peaceful political process. TGS also opposes any cultural measures, such as Kurdish language education, that would appear to give Turkey's Kurds -- who are not regarded as a minority in any legal sense -- a special status.

Implications of "Judicial Coup"

¶7. (C) The March 14 closure case against the AKP (ref E) adds a new dimension to the military's struggle against the ruling party. If TGS feels vindicated by the case against the AKP, the military leadership has offered no public comment. Most expect TGS to act coolly and with restraint in the days ahead, distancing itself from court debate, and allowing another wing of Turkey's secular establishment to take its run at the AKP. The inevitable political distractions expected as the closure case drags on will likely weaken the government's hand as it considers non-military initiatives towards Turkey's Kurdish population, making consensus on those proposals more difficult.

¶8. (C) Currently at odds with all parties in parliament and unable to effectively influence public sentiment through press statements or dire Internet warnings, TGS is forced to rely on like-minded allies in the judiciary and bureaucracy who similarly feel that the Republic - and their stake in it - is under threat. The closure case currently before the Constitutional Court bears no overt military fingerprints but serves the military purpose of keeping AKP in a tight box.

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